Securitizing the Unseen: Behind Trump's Reliance on Mexico in Combating Irregular Immigration

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ABSTRACT

This research aims to analyze the reasons behind Trump's decision to pressure Mexico to combat irregular immigration. Trump's administration showed an exceptional commitment to immigration control and dramatically re-oriented the immigration control mechanism in the United States (US). Despite unprecedented amounts of changes in the US internal immigration system under Trump, his presidency relied on Mexico for his securitization cause. Due to massive migration activities along the US-Mexico border, Trump forced Mexican authorities to cooperate with US institutions to reduce and filter migrant flows coming to the US. Nonetheless, existing literature regarding US immigration did not explain the reason behind Trump's reliance on Mexican authorities and its cooperation system; thus this article aims to fill the gap. This research applies the migration securitization framework in evaluating the US immigration system prior to the 2019 US-Mexico joint statement on immigration. Using Bourbeau's migration securitization framework, the research found that Trump's immigration policy faced barriers due to interference from the opposition party. This research concluded that the US federal system and political climate confined Trump's immigration enforcement efforts, thus pushing the administration to burden Mexican authorities with its enforcement efforts.

Keywords: irregular immigration, Mexico, migration securitization, Trump, US

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis keputusan presiden Trump dalam menekan Meksiko untuk memerangi imigran gelap. Pemerintahan Trump menunjukkan komitmen luar biasa dalam mengontrol sistem imigrasi di Amerika Serikat (AS), mengorientasikan mekanisme imigrasi internal secara dramatis. Namun, terlepas dari perubahan besar dalam mekanisme imigrasi dibawah pemerintahan Trump, presiden Trump bergantung terhadap pemerintah Meksiko dalam mengimplementasikan agenda sekuritisasinya. Karena aktivitas migrasi besar-besaran di sepanjang perbatasan AS-Meksiko, Trump memaksa otoritas Meksiko untuk bekerja sama dalam menyaring arus migran yang datang ke AS. Studi-studi sebelumnya tidak menjelaskan alasan dibalik ketergantungan Trump pada otoritas Meksiko, sehingga artikel ini bertujuan mengisi kekosongan tersebut. Penelitian ini menerapkan kerangka sekuritisasi imigrasi dalam mengevaluasi sistem imigrasi AS sebelum pernyataan bilateral AS-Meksiko tahun 2019 tentang imigrasi. Menggunakan kerangka Sekuritisasi Bourbeau, penelitian ini menemukan bahwa kebijakan imigrasi Trump terhambat oleh campur tangan partai oposisi. Penelitian ini menyimpulkan bahwa sistem federal dan iklim politik di AS membatasi upaya penegakan imigrasi Trump, sehingga mendorong pemerintahan untuk membebani pemerintah Meksiko dengan upaya penegakannya.

Kata-kata Kunci: Amerika Serikat, imigrasi ilegal, Meksiko, sekuritisasi imigrasi, Trump

Among the world's busiest migration routes, one of the most worrying is located at the US-Mexico border. Due to severe internal violence in Central America and Northern Triangle (NT) countries (El Salvador, Honduras, Guatemala), migrants swarmed into Mexico, followed by transnational criminal linkages. Massive local gang violence, forced cartel recruitments, smuggling activities, and economic crisis had worsened Mexico's internal condition and caused Mexicans to take refuge in the US (Chiquiar and Salcedo 2013). The chain effect of the refugee trend in Latin America eventually contributed to the rapid increase in the migration rate at the US-Mexico border (BTI Institute 2021). The US government had its concerns regarding the US-Mexico border. The Clinton administration initiated mass immigration control by issuing the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act (IIRIRA) in response to the first Mexican migration wave, as the administration hoped to speed up the deportation process and harden citizenship requirements (Chiquiar and Salcedo 2013). President Clinton's IIRIRA was a vital contributor to future presidential terms, heavily utilized by both the Bush and Trump administration.

President Trump was particularly extensive about immigration control, known for winning an election by bringing up immigration-related reasons in his campaigns (Bolter et al. 2022). He strongly condemned migration from the southern border, particularly Mexico, in his 2016 immigration campaign in Arizona, accusing the southern border migration of stealing jobs and increasing crime rates in the US (The New York Times 2016). Trump started his presidential term in 2017 with major revisions to immigration law and applied the largest enforcement scale known in the history of US immigration policy. Furthermore, Trump threatened Mexico to cooperate in reducing the number of border crossers at the US-Mexico border (Soto 2020). Mexican authorities responded to the ultimatum through a joint declaratio2019 regarding refugee control (US Department of State 2019). It is interesting to note how the US turned to Mexico to control the migration issue, which leads this research to analyze the reason behind Trump's reliance on the Mexican government for immigration control.

The majority of existing research on the US-Mexican border and migration issue covers deeply domestic discussions. Tienda and Sánchez (2013), Garcia-Rios and Barreto (2016), and Brown et al. (2018), for instance, similarly pointed out that Latin identity in the US and their political participation affect local citizens' views and treatment of the population. While at the border, Donato and Perez (2017) discussed the increasing rate of children asylum seekers from Latin American countries due to local violence (Donato and Perez 2017). In terms of immigration enforcement, Hanson et al. (2023) brought a historical perspective in analyzing US immigration from Latin America. Meanwhile, Amuedo-Dorantes et al. (2013), Armenta (2017), Whan (2018), and Nowrasteh (2016) pointed out that the US gradually shifted to a restrictive immigration policy. Regarding securitization in other countries, Neal (2009) discussed the EU's border protection agency named *frontières extérieures* or FRONTEX (Neal 2009). However, existing studies did not sufficiently explain the Trump government's mindset behind the immigration enforcement efforts nor explain what pushed the administration to share the burden with Mexican authorities, an explanation gap this research aims to fill.

Migration Securitization

The Copenhagen school defines securitization as an extreme political scheme of antagonizing specific objects through narrative framing. Securitization is not limited to conventional threats requiring military institutions' involvement (Gad and Petersen 2011). Securitization requires a securitizing actor who would construct a sense of emergency in response to a phenomenon, inducing awareness in the audiences that their existential condition is threatened by the specific entity to justify measures to contain the threat or entity. Securitizing actor aims to make a consensus with audiences to cooperate in eliminating or containing the so-called threat (Baysal 2020). However, Phillipe Bourbeau argued that existing pieces of literature on securitization ended as a "binary" notion, simply describing the securitization phenomenon in either exist or non-exist spectrum. Bourbeau pointed out that securitization is a matter of scale or intensity, a measurable concept. Bourbeau proposed several parameters to

measure securitization intensity in immigration policy, including institutional and security practices indicators (Bourbeau 2011).

In terms of institutional indicators that can be used to measure securitization intensity, Bourbeau (2011) explains that there are three parameters. The first parameter (I-1) is legal institutional components, which comprise key laws oriented on securitizing the country's immigration system. The second parameter (I-2) is the orientation of migration and security which relate to the institution's priorities in enforcing immigration laws and how seriously they view migration as a security concern. Meanwhile, the third parameter (I-3) is the linkage saliency between migration and security, meaning how the policies issued by the incumbent administration consider whether the immigration concern is seen as the main existential threat. On the other hand, the security practices indicators comprise two parameters. The first parameter (P-1) is interdiction, meaning the types of restrictions applied to immigrant movements within the state's jurisdiction. The second parameter (P-2) is detention, a quantitative measurement of detention evidence that may show patterns related to the securitization agenda (Bourbeau 2011).

This research adopts the qualitative method, particularly the cross-case analysis technique. Cross-case analysis technique was proposed by Michael Huberman and Matthew Miles as a hybrid technique of two approaches with opposite orientations each. This technique aims to effectively paint a clearer picture of a large-scale phenomenon, a hybrid technique ideal for dissecting a large-scale phenomenon. The two techniques of cross-case analysis are case-oriented analysis and variable-oriented analysis. Case-oriented analysis conducts a full-scale surgery of one specific case of a phenomenon with a high level of prominence and gains as much detailed information as possible to generate an accurate understanding of one specific phenomenon. This approach is utilized to accumulate information surrounding Bourbeau's parameters. Variable-oriented analysis is utilized to study patterns of a large-scale phenomenon, dissecting multiple cases and finding similarities or patterns as points of reference. This approach is utilized to find evidence of field enforcement related to Trump's policies (Babbie 2011).

Trump's Orientation and Imposed Laws

Trump's administration was responsible for the biggest changes in the US immigration laws since the Global War on Terror (GWOT) era. The biggest difference between the GWOT and Trump's immigration policies lies in the orientation. President Bush created the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) to mitigate foreign espionage risks (US Department of Homeland Security 2003). In a White House press release, the Bush administration stated that the administration considered the deportation of millions of illegal immigrants in the US unwise and unrealistic and supported a rational middle between mass deportation and amnesty (The White House: President George W. Bush 2007). In contrast difference, Trump advertised his mass deportation plan during the 2016 election campaign, clearly stating that he would give no amnesty to any form of unauthorized immigration (NBC News 2016).

Following Trump's election as the president of the US, the Trump administration issued the 13767 Executive Order (EO) entitled "Border Security and Immigration Enforcement Improvements." The EO's purpose stated that aliens or illegal immigrants that entered the US without prior inspection "present a significant threat to national security and public safety" (US Federal Register 2017). Of all laws Trump put in place, the 13767 EO contained the most significant provisions because the order extensively upgraded the DHS. At least two sections of the EO highlighted revisions on internal enforcement. Section 5 details the directive for DHS-owned detention facilities to be operational in regions near the Mexico border. Meanwhile, Section 10 details the revitalization of the Federal-State cooperation platform through Section 287(g) of the Immigration and Nationality Act (INA). The platform allows the ICE to extend its field enforcement to local police departments. Since its creation, Trump has expanded the program to its largest extent and directed newer contracts to be applied at the southern border (US Federal Register 2017).

Besides internal enforcement, Trump's administration also strengthened the border enforcement mechanism through three sections highlighting revisions on laws and immigration status. Section 6 details authorization for law enforcement to detain

illegal border crossers, effectively criminalizing illegal crossers that entail removal or deportation instead of amnesty. Section 8 details additional recruitment for border patrols under the Customs and Border Protection (CBP), with up to 5,000 personnel to be stationed as soon as they are drafted. Section 9 details the directive for a major review of federal aid by executive branches assigned to Mexican authorities, including military aid (US Federal Register 2017).

Key Institutions and Enforcement Options

Of all US executive departments, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) remains the forefront institution to enforce immigration control through its two sub-departments: Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and Customs and Border Protection (CBP). The ICE is tasked with internal enforcement by surveilling immigrants, particularly those potentially threatening. At the border, the CBP is responsible for interdiction and deterrence against threats within people's mobilities. As stated in the second article in the general guideline of CBP's "Use of Force" handbook, deterrence and interdiction are two of CBP's core duties (US Customs and Border Protection 2021; US Customs and Border Protection 2023). Another DHS sub-department related to the immigration sector is the US Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) which is tasked with citizenship administrations (US Citizenship and Immigration Services 2023). However, the USCIS is simply an administrative institution, while ICE and CBP remained key actors in the entire Trump immigration system.

Trump tasked the ICE to expand 287(g) contracts to a maximum extent (Fitzgerald et al. 2019). The 287(g) program is a cooperation platform between ICE and local police departments to maximize the means of mitigating "dangerous migrants" through a contract system. Contracted local police departments would dispatch ICE-deputized officers to detain warranted migrants based on suspicion of their citizenship status. The officers are also tasked to interview detainees, exchange databases with ICE to confirm detainees' admissibility, and transfer detainees to ICE's custody if proven admissible for removal. In short, the 287(g) program

capitalizes local sheriffs to perform ICE's field duties (American Immigration Council 2019). At the border, the US Attorney General, Jeff Sessions, announced that the Department of Justice (DOJ) approved the initiation of a "Zero Tolerance Policy" (US Department of Justice 2021). Sessions introduced a hardline policy that separates children migrants from their parents at the border as a means of deterring illegal crossings (Vox News 2018) Trump also used the COVID-19 pandemic as a justification to re-instate Title 42 of the 1944 Public Health Service Act that empowers US health departments to interdict people's movement at the southern border (ABC News 2022).

Enforcing Immigration and Internal Barriers

Internally, the 287(g) program faced administrative barriers. Successes were almost only found in the Republican-controlled states. According to the ICE's report, most of the 287(g) contracts were found in Texas, Arizona, and Florida with no dominant party. Texas alone accounted for one-third of the program (US Immigration and Customs Enforcement 2023). A serious obstacle was, however, found in California, a state deeply controlled by the Democrat party. The majority of Democrat politicians are pro-immigrant, proven by their campaign of "Sanctuary Jurisdiction" an unofficial terminology that describes the jurisdiction's openness to illegal immigrants as citizens and severe limitation to the local police department's cooperation with the ICE (SAC Attorneys LLP 2023). Such a campaign significantly limited Trump's enforcement efforts because California housed the largest migrant population in the country and shared a direct border with a migrant crossing hub in Tijuana, Mexico (Migration Policy Institute 2021).

Trump considered sanctions against "Sanctuary Jurisdictions" and attempted to deprive the state government's funding unless it was willing to adopt the administration's enforcement efforts. An early attempt to block state funding in 2017 was foiled by a federal court in 2017 (Reuters 2017). To further pressure "Sanctuary Jurisdictions," Trump attempted to nationally ban a migrant protection program called the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA), an amnesty program for undocumented

children migrants through financial and educational aid. In 2017, the program accounted for protecting approximately 700,000 recipients comprised of children migrants, where California was home to the largest number of DACA recipients, comprised of 29% of total recipients (Pew Research Center 2017). Trump insisted on litigating the program by accusing it of hosting dangerous people that attempt to misuse tax funding (The Los Angeles Times 2017). The debate reached the US supreme court in 2019, which foiled Trump's proposal to ban the program nationally. The supreme court allowed each state to treat the program at its discretion, followed by the Texas government's legal action of banning the program's application (The Texas Tribune 2020). Trump's attempts to extend enforcement efforts to California were thus all failed.

At the border, the CBP significantly increased cooperation with US Intelligence Community (IC) to intensify deep surveillance on civilian properties, including searches on personal phones and laptops, which contributed to a significant increase of up to 30,000 searches in 2017 compared to the year 2016 (The Daily Beast 2018). Another form of mass interdiction was carried out under the Title 42 policy. Since the reinstatement, the program expelled approximately two million border crossers without legal procedures (ABC News 2022). Regarding deterrence, the DHS limited detained migrants' consultation with an immigration attorney to only one day to ensure a coherent argument for migrants to claim asylum (Widmer 2021). Through the family separation policy, between the fiscal year 2017 to 2018, the total number of separated children from their families reached 5,000 persons, with 1,677 children not being reunited with their parents (The Guardian 2021). Journalists reported concerns about CBP's work that falsely alleged random civilians for being affiliated with criminal networks. The CBP had a case of mistaking a Salvadoran person as a member of a street gang named MS-13 (Pro Republica 2019). A civil rights agency formed a legal protest regarding concerns of excessive measures by CBP, pointing out vulnerable underaged children from 5 years old being separated from their parents (AP News 2019).

Trump's Era of Migrant Detention

In a year, Trump's improved ICE showed that its enforcement resulted in considerably high detention traffic. Figure 1 showed a significant increase of 32,762 ICE detainment in Fiscal Year 2017 compared to 2016, accounting for a 42% increase from the previous administration. Up to 92% of total detained migrants in 2017 were undocumented immigrants (Immigration and Customs Enforcement 2017). However, compared to crime rates, the detainment rate in 2017 shows a substantive flaw. Among the 110,568 migrants detained by the ICE in 2017, 37,734 were non-criminal convicts, accounting for approximately 15,000 detainees, or a 146% rate increase compared to 2016 (Pierce et al. 2018). Considering the application of the 287(g) was aimed at containing dangerous migrants instead of random convicts, ICE's first year was proved to have significant substantive flaws.

Figure 1
ICE Migrant Arrest Statistics (2016-2017)

Figure 3. FY2016 and FY2017 ERO Administrative Arrests from January 20 to End of FY
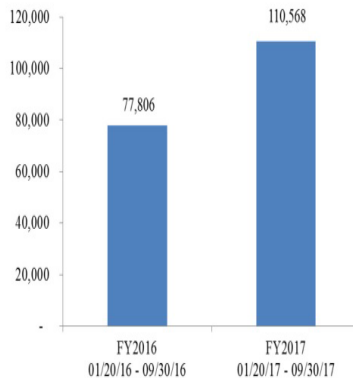
Source: Immigration and Customs Enforcement (2017)

The accumulative removal number also displayed a similar flaw. The statistics in Figure 2 showed a significant increase in deported non-criminals in the interior by 2017 compared to the previous two years, accounting for 8,730 more detainees than in 2016. Cumulative non-criminal border removal in 2017 decreased by 17% compared to the previous year, however, mainly due to

fewer migrants that crossed the border in 2017 (Immigration and Customs Enforcement 2017). Presented detention statistics in Figure 2 essentially prove that the administration's justification to "secure immigration" was substantially flawed.

Figure 2

Interior vs. Border Program Removals by Criminality (2015-2017)

Figure 15. FY2015 – FY2017 Interior vs. Border Program Removals by Criminality
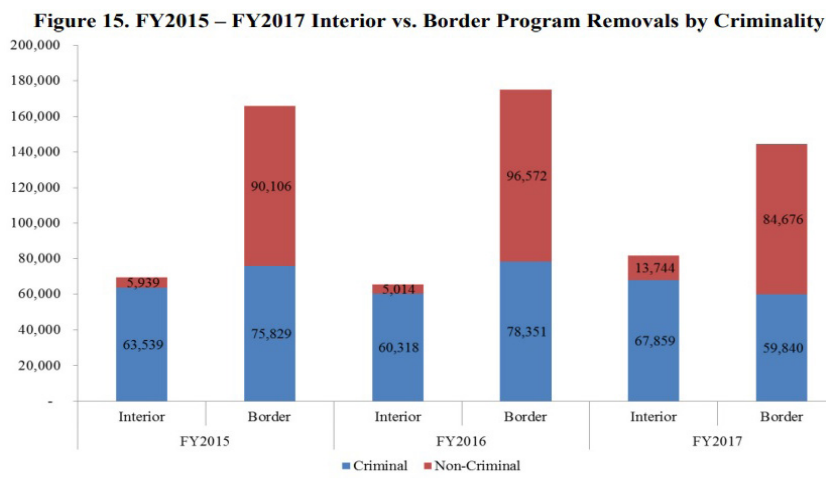
Source: Immigration and Customs Enforcement (2017)

US-Mexico Joint Statement on Immigration

On June 2019, Trump's administration reached an agreement with the Mexican government on the immigration issues between the two, which led to the creation of a joint statement. The US-Mexico joint statement is, technically, a form of forced demand by Trump's administration against Mexican authorities and Trump's tactic to circumvent the Democrat party's blockade of DHS enforcement efforts. The contents of the joint statement strongly indicate that Mexican authorities held the majority of the heavy tasks. There are two vital points in the joint statement related to immigration control. The first point, "Mexican Enforcement Surge," is detailed below:

> "Mexico will take unprecedented steps to-increase enforcement to curb irregular migration, to include the deployment of its National Guard throughout Mexico, giving priority to its southern border. Mexico is also taking decisive action to dismantle human smuggling and trafficking organizations as well as their illicit financial and transportation networks. Additionally, the United States and Mexico commit to strengthen bilateral cooperation, including information sharing and coordinated actions to better protect and secure *out* common border." (US Department of State 2019).

Reducing irregular migration, in this case, was aimed at migration flows coming from countries south of Mexico's border. The point also included bilateral cooperation and information sharing between the two countries in securing the US-Mexico border. Through bilateral cooperation, it is strongly implied that Trump attempted to circumvent key institutions' efforts in enforcing immigration laws by bypassing internal barriers, mainly the "Sanctuary Jurisdiction," and taking its efforts outside the confinement of the US federal system. Such cooperation was largely proved by the Congressional Research Service (CRS) report regarding the DHS announcement of a US-Mexico multiagency operation in combating trafficking networks happening at the US-Mexico border. The operation was codenamed Operation Sentinel (Congressional Research Service 2021).

Meanwhile, the second point, "Migrant Protection Protocols," details below, strongly indicates that most of the migration flow control should be Mexico's responsibility.

> "The United States will immediately expand the implementation of the existing Migrant Protection Protocols across its entire Southern Border. This means that those crossing the U.S. Southern Border to seek asylum will be rapidly returned to Mexico where they may await the adjudication of their asylum claims. In response, Mexico will authorize the entrance of all of those individuals for humanitarian

> reasons, in compliance with its international
> obligations, while they await the adjudication
> of their asylum claims. Mexico will also offer
> jobs, healthcare and education according to
> its principles. The United States commits to
> work to accelerate the adjudication of asylum
> claims and to conclude. removal proceedings as
> expeditiously as possible." (US Department of
> State 2019).

It is implied that the US burden Mexico with responsibilities to
cover all humanitarian basis for migrants' life and welfare. Mexico
is also expected to stretch its long-term humanitarian responsibility
for migrants. Mexico's role in covering humanitarian basis for
immigrants has something to do with the administrational and
complications of difficulties at the US border. The 13767 EO
hardened the requirements to filter asylum seekers and distinguish
between the vulnerable and those affiliated with TOC groups (US
Federal Register 2017).

Linking Trump's Migration Policy to
Bourbeau's Securitization Indicators

The efforts Trump's administration made to strengthen
immigration enforcement thus can be understood as a securitization
attempt when linked to the indicators of a securitization process,
according to Bourbeau (2011). In terms of institutional indicators,
the key provisions of Trump's immigration enforcement which
were contained within the 13767 EO serve as the first parameter
(I-1). The 13767 EO effectively expanded the powers of key
institutions in immigration control, namely ICE and CBP, and
considered southern border migration a significant threat. In
terms of the second parameter of the institutional indicator or
parameter (I-2) regarding institutions' orientation on migration
and security, Trump consistently put immigration and security
concerns throughout his policies which were linear with the two
key institutions, ICE and CBP, in their functions and missions.
In terms of the third institutional indicator parameter (I-3)
regarding linkage saliency between migration and security, the
saliency is considerably strong under Trump's administration.

Trump's administration enforced policies and key institutions which considered southern border immigration a major security problem, extensively committed to limiting people's movement in the region. The Trump administration's initiative to circumvent the Democrat party's blockade of enforcement efforts by burdening Mexican authorities also displayed its extensive commitment.

In terms of the security practices indicators parameter (P-1) regarding interdiction, the largest form of interdiction was found at the southern border. The CBP increased the surveillance rate, separated more families, and successfully employed Title 42. Internal interdiction largely happened through the 287(g) program. The ICE successfully extended its enforcement efforts to Republican-controlled states near the US-Mexico border. However, Trump's inability to penetrate the "Sanctuary Jurisdiction" barrier, especially in California, was his major failure. Trump circumvented the failure by establishing joint cooperation between US and Mexican authorities to mitigate criminal networks and allow the DHS to bypass internal barriers. In terms of the parameter (P-2) regarding detention, accumulative detention numbers significantly increased in a mere one year of Trump's administration with however flawed substances. Trump's enforcement efforts criminalized and deported more non-criminal convicts than in previous years, essentially damaging the administration's justification of keeping the country secure from "dangerous migrants."

Conclusion

After linking the findings back to Bourbeau's securitization indicators, almost in all aspects, Trump's overall securitization was considerably intense. Trump's capable and responsible assets for immigration control efforts effectively prioritized regions near the US-Mexico border. However, Trump's major failure in implementing the enforcement was due to the country's federal system, which the opposition party took advantage of. This confinement forced Trump to circumvent its work beyond the national boundary to Mexico. This research concluded that Trump's reliance on Mexican authority happened because

the federal system and political climate confined his interior enforcement efforts. This research still lacks several aspects, such as field data on police officers' work, nationality data per detainee, another form of field information, and Mexico's enforcement efforts, since this article primarily focuses on the reasons behind Trump's reliance on Mexican authorities. The writer encourages future researchers to complete the lack of this research and apply Bourbeau's securitization indicators in other countries.

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